

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. at the Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Robert Zweiman, national commander, Jewish War Veterans of the

USA, and Maj. Gen. Robert F. Foley, USA, Commanding General, U.S. Army Military District of Washington.

Remarks on Signing the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 and an Exchange With Reporters

November 12, 1996

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Vice President, and to the members of the administration and especially to the large delegation of Members of Congress who are here from both parties. I thank you all for coming and for creating this legislation which will protect and expand the treasure of our national parks.

This legislation affirms our solemn commitment to say, from one end of our Nation to the other, we will be good stewards of the land that God has given us. This bill will create or improve almost 120 parks, trails, rivers, historical sites in 41 of our 50 States.

It turns the Presidio, a former military post in San Francisco, into a sanctuary of nature and history by establishing a nonprofit trust to manage the Presidio's property. It gives us a blueprint for national parks that one day will be able to sustain themselves without Government funds. I thank Senators Boxer and Feinstein and Representative Pelosi for their work on this.

The legislation preserves the Sterling Forest on the New York-New Jersey border. This new park, just 40 miles from New York City, will put nature within reach of millions of families of all backgrounds. It will safeguard a watershed that provides clean drinking water for the people of New Jersey. It will show that a forest that was left for dead a century ago can be brought back to life and protected today. I thank Senator Bradley and Senator-elect Torricelli and Representative Hinchey especially for their work on this.

The legislation will establish the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas. Four hundred thousand square miles of this prairie covered our continent when Lewis and Clark made their great journey. Today, only a tiny fraction of it remains. This bill will help to restore 11,000 acres of this uniquely American land-

scape with its 9-foot-tall grass and rich plant and animal life. I'm pleased to say that it will also give the State of Kansas its very first national park. I thank Senator Kassebaum especially for her work on this, as well as Secretary Glickman, who supported this project when he was a Member of Congress.

The legislation does much more. It establishes the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail in Alabama, the 54-mile stretch of road that Dr. Martin Luther King walked in 1965 to remind Americans of how far we had to travel to live up to our ideals of equality and justice for all. And I thank, especially, the man who walked a lot of those miles with Dr. King, Congressman John Lewis, for his leadership in that regard.

This bill also gives us the resources to upgrade housing for Park Service employees. Many of these dedicated public servants have been spending their winters living in 30-year-old trailers that were supposed to last only one summer. That's going to change. I must say that one of the more rewarding aspects of being President has been visiting our national parks and getting to know the people who get up every day and put on the National Park Service uniform. It is amazing, the level of talent, training, and commitment those people bring to this job and the sacrifices, financial and other, that they're willing to accept to do the work that they love. But they deserve a better deal. And for the service they do to us, I thank the Congress for providing decent housing to them.

I'm also proud of what this bill does not do. It no longer contains provisions that would have taken land away from Virginia's Shenandoah and Richmond Battlefield parks. It does not open the Sequoia National Park in California or the Red Rock region of Utah to development that I believe would be destructive.

I also want to say, finally, that I hope we can see more legislation like this in the next 4 years. This bill is a model of how we ought to work together. This bill had strong Republican support; it had strong Democratic support. We said we were going to put our national treasures beyond partisan politics and put the people of America, their future, and their environment above that. And I was very gratified by it, and I want to say again to the Members here and to those who are not here who played a leading role in this legislation, it is a model of how democracy ought to work.

So now I want to sign the bill. I want to say that I ask Congress to continue to work with me in this same spirit, to protect the environment, to strengthen the community right-to-know protections, to toughen punishment for polluters, to clean up two-thirds of the existing toxic waste sites by the year 2000. We can meet these challenges if we work together in the future, as we did to pass this terrific piece of legislation.

Thank you very much.

[At this point, the President signed the legislation.]

Second Term Transition

Q. Mr. President, how close are you to naming a new Secretary of State, and will former Senator George Mitchell be the nominee?

The President. I haven't made a decision. I'm working on it. I'm working on a lot of appointments now, and I will do it when I'm ready to do it. It's a very important decision.

Bipartisanship

Q. Mr. President, what will you say to the congressional leaders, especially the Republicans, when you meet with them this afternoon to encourage this idea of bipartisanship?

The President. Well, I think the first thing I'd like to do is to—it'll be the first chance I have to thank them in a room together for what happened in the last 6 or 8 weeks of the last Congress, where you had Senator Kassebaum and Senator Kennedy's bill pass, a number of some other health reform legislation passed. We had the minimum wage, small-business pension, adoption tax credit legislation passed, the welfare reform legislation. It was a remarkable period of incredibly productive legislation, and that shows what we can do when we work together. And I would just encourage us to do

that, beginning with balancing the budget and the campaign finance reform. But there are lots of other things we have to do. So, basically, today I just want to reaffirm my commitment to try to re-create that spirit and keep it going.

Health Care Reform

Q. Sir, Senator Lott, in particular, has said he would like what amounts to almost an admission from you and from the Democrats that using words like "cut," "slash," "wreck" referring to Medicare in the ads was, as they put it, demagoguery and unfair. They want you to set the record straight, so to speak. Will you cooperate?

The President. Well, I didn't read what he said exactly in that way. I think the—what we objected to, I don't think that it was going to come back again anyway. The \$270 billion option is not there and no longer needed, which is one of the problems with our budgeting process. You know, the inflation rate in health care has come down so much because of the increase in competition and efficiency that no one any longer believes that we need to do that again, I don't believe.

So the question is whether we can basically take up where we left off, where the differences between us were smaller. And I think that's just the—we'll just have to talk about how to do that.

Senator Lott, to be fair to him, has got to have time to meet with—he's got some new Members. He's got to have time to meet with his caucus to develop a strategy. I think we'll be working together on this. I certainly hope we will.

Q. Mr. President, do you have any views on—

Bipartisanship

Q. Wasn't this remarkable period really driven by the fact that there was an election coming up and that Republicans didn't want to be perceived—

The President. It does, and I'll compare it to mine. It may have been driven by that. But the point is, the people ratified what was done, you know. There is no way to read the election results as they came out as a repudiation of the last 2 months of the last Congress. It clearly has to be seen as a ratification of the last 2 months of the last Congress and what was done.

And so it shouldn't take—you know, I'm not always as quick on the uptake as I ought to be, but it shouldn't take me another year and a half to figure that out. I have a fresh memory of what happened, and I think that's the way the Members will receive it as well.

Q. Trent Lott says the first move is up to you on Medicare. Are you ready to make the first move?

The President. Under the rules, I have to present a budget, and I'm certainly prepared to present a budget. But in the end, we will still have to reconcile. You know, we don't want to get into that—I don't agree with every characterization that was put on our economic program in 1993; I think that's why we're in the shape we're in today. We've got that interest rate down, went forward. But there's no point in us going back and litigating what we thought of each other's programs that we didn't agree with. We need to focus on how we can reach agreement now.

We're in this boat together and we have to paddle it together. And that's what the American people want. We've got to remember that the American people are in the boat with us, and we're not nearly as important as they are and their future. And so it's time for us to each pick up our paddle and row. And I think that's what we'll wind up doing.

Balanced Budget Amendment

Q. Mr. President, would you consider supporting a balanced budget amendment, given the change in the Republican Senate?

The President. Do I expect the Congress to support it?

Q. Well, no. Would you consider supporting it, given the change in the Senate now?

The President. You know, my problems with it always were—you know, I lived under one as a Governor, and we produced 12 balanced budgets, and I'm trying to get back to a balanced budget system here.

My problems with a constitutional amendment were always more a question of how to manage the larger economic problems of the country. The Nation's budget is different from a State, and I just want to make sure that if we have one, it needs to be clear in terms of how—and it needs to really give us the possibility of dealing with a recession. You don't want to wind up with a Congress someday in a recession raising taxes or throwing unemployed peo-

ple off health care because they're trying to get to a balanced budget. Then you could actually wind up making the deficit worse.

If it sets a framework and says that in the 21st century in the economy we're going to be living in, other things being equal, we ought always to be balancing our books, I agree with that. I just don't think you—we may tie our hands more than we will achieve. So what I'm going to focus my energies on is getting the balanced budget. I don't have a vote in the Congress. My voice counts, presumably, but I don't have a vote. But I do have the responsibility to help the American people get the balanced budget, and that's what I'm going to focus my energies on.

Q. So you don't reject the amendment out of hand?

The President. Well, what I—I don't believe we need it, and it can't be an excuse—for a long time I was afraid it would be an excuse to throw the burden on somebody else by the Congress, because by definition you have to have it down the road. It takes awhile to ratify. But my belief is that you—I don't believe that we need it, but if we have it, it ought to be able to be implemented in a way that actually works and gives the country what it needs to manage a recession because, you know, we won't always have—someday down the road we'll have another bad patch in the economy. I mean, we just know that's going to happen.

You know, you don't have—no one has a total trouble-free life; no country has a trouble-free economy. Someday down the road—and we just don't want an amendment to wind up making our recession worse and causing us to do things that are counterproductive that you would never do in a recession. In a recession you would never raise taxes, and you wouldn't throw people who are unemployed through no fault of their own off of health care eligibility because you were trying to balance the budget.

So that's the only thing I'm—if the escape hatch is good, then we'll manage it the best way we can. The American people—we're a very practical people. We'll find a way to deal with the amendment if the amendment—the thing I want us to do is, if you look at this global economy, look how much more economic activity was generated in America when we lowered the deficit and lowered interest rates, and it totally overwhelmed the contractionary effects of reducing the deficit by holding spending

down. And we would be better off in this kind of economy always targeting a balanced budget unless there is a substantial recession, in which case we don't want to raise taxes on people when they don't have as much money as they should anyway. That's what I'm worried about.

So that's why I'm telling you I'm going to be working on putting a balanced budget in there. If we get it, if we can get the Congress to pass a plan that will achieve that, we'll have

the desired economic effect, short term and long term, and then whatever happens with the amendment will happen.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:18 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. H.R. 4236, approved November 12, was assigned Public Law No. 104-333.

Statement on Signing the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996

November 12, 1996

Today I have signed into law H.R. 4236, the "Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996," a comprehensive bill addressing the management of the Nation's invaluable national parks, forests, and other natural resources.

I am pleased the Congress passed this legislation with bipartisan support in both Houses and has removed numerous provisions to which my Administration strongly objected.

The Act will create or improve almost 120 national parks, trails, rivers, or historical sites in 41 of our States. As President Teddy Roosevelt said: "[t]he nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, not impaired, in value." This Act will help ensure that we follow that advice and protect for the next generation some of our most valuable natural and historical resources.

One of the most important provisions that my Administration supported would improve the management of the Presidio in San Francisco. This military post, dating from 1776, includes both beautiful open spaces appropriate for National Park Service management and hundreds of unused buildings requiring a more innovative approach. This Act establishes a government corporation, known as the Presidio Trust, to refurbish and lease these buildings quickly and efficiently, but in a manner consistent with overall park management requirements.

Another laudable provision authorizes appropriations of \$17.5 million to help the New York-New Jersey Palisades Interstate Park Commission to acquire lands within the Sterling Forest

Reserve, just 40 miles from midtown Manhattan. This is one of the last areas of pristine forest in the Northeast and the area is critical for supplying safe drinking water to northern New Jersey.

I am also pleased that the Act establishes the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas. The North American Continent was once covered by over 400,000 square miles of tallgrass prairie. Today, less than 1 percent remains. This Act will help to restore 11,000 acres of tallgrass prairie, an ecosystem of grass as tall as 9 feet, and includes trees, flowers, birds and other wildlife. This ecosystem is nationally significant and the Preserve is a welcome addition to the National Park System.

My Administration supports many other provisions in this omnibus legislation, including designation of 10 separate nonfederal national heritage areas in Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Iowa, Ohio, and New York. Other provisions would help to preserve the Nation's cultural heritage by authorizing memorials, protecting historic areas, designating the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail in Alabama, and authorizing the establishment of a Martin Luther King, Jr., memorial in the District of Columbia.

This Act also includes scores of park boundary adjustments, land exchanges, and provisions to assist agencies in protecting national parks, forests, and public lands.

At the same time, the bill deletes almost all of the provisions of the earlier conference agree-